DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 227 CS 504 277

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TITLE How Films Function as Persuasion for the Mass Audience.
PUB DATE 27 May 83
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Dallas, TX, May 26-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Cultural Influences; *Emotional Response; *Film Production; *Films; *Mass Media Effects; *Social Values; Violence
IDENTIFIERS *Audience Response

ABSTRACT

Reaching millions of people weekly, film is possibly the most persuasive of all media today. Its success is due to the combination of the filmmakers' shrewd audience analysis and audience techniques with the medium's ability to involve viewers intellectually, emotionally, and even physically in the vivid images on the screen. Once a major means of socializing European and Asian immigrants, commercial films today still encourage consumer socialization, sparking audience demand for both goods seen during movies and spin-off items such as toys and T-shirts, sold afterward. Although usually supporting accepted social values--the pain caused by the father's absence in "E.T.," for example, reaffirms the importance of family unity--films at times contradict widely held attitudes. The psychological imbalance created by such a contradiction forces viewers to clarify their own positions. More than attitudes, movies influence behavior, encouraging viewers to model their actions after sympathetic film characters. Recent studies, for example, suggest that rationalized film violence, especially when performed by characters with whom the audience can identify, increases aggressive behavior in viewers. Further research on the impact of such an influential medium is needed. (MM)

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HOW FILMS FUNCTION AS PERSUASION FOR THE MASS AUDIENCE

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May 27, 1983

CS 504 377

HOW FILMS FUNCTION AS PERSUASION FOR THE MASS AUDIENCE

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The motion picture industry in America is big business and exists primarilty because investors want to make a profit. Profit-making has always been the driving force in the motion picture industry. Since profit-making is dependent upon attracting large audiences to see films, the audience is, to a large extent, the determiner of what is profitable. 1982 was the biggest profit-making year in history for the motion picture industry (Schatz, 1983), thus the people who make and finance films must know what it takes to appeal to their audience. They have to know because if a large studio does not have a big money-maker with at least one film out of every ten it finances, it is in financial trouble (Becker, 1983:248).

The audience for motion pictures is basically young. 62% of the motion picture audience is between 16 and 29 years old (Becker, 1983:252). This young audience is also well educated. In a survey conducted for the Motion Picture Association of America, Daniel Yankelovich, Inc. discovered that 30% of the population of the United States who have one year or more of college education are frequent movie-goers, attending a minimum of one film per month(O'Donnell and Kable, 1982:194).

A combination of filmmaking decisions, marketing techniques, and audience analyses constitute persuasion in and for film. This paper is an analysis of how films function as persuasion for the mass audience.

Many film theorists believe that film may be the most persuasive form of all media (Belazs,1970:17; Rotha,1952:58). Filmmakers also indicate that their art has the capability to influence large bodies of people. Vassilis Vassilikos, author of the novel Z and associate scriptwriter for the Costa-Gavras film Z, said, when he spoke at North Texas State University, "Film is the best way to move the masses." (1980) Paul Rotha, a filmmaker and theorist, said that "cinema is one of the most powerful channels of expression for persuasion and public illumination." (1952:58) Rotha gave three reasons for film's power: (1) mass suggestion, (2) simple explanation accompanied by artistic craftsmanship, and (3) mechanized and repeated performance to millions of persons.

Since film is an entertainment medium, most people do not expect to be persuaded, thus their resistance to persuasion is reduced. Audiences tend to take film naturally, without suspicion, and feel at ease with its conventions. They sit in a comfortable, darkened theater, free from most distractions, giving optimal attention to a flickering image on the screen that is often the only source of light. The dark environment has a tendency to produce a lowered defense reaction and a heightened emotional reaction. Psychologists Gordon Globus and Roy Shulman studied the effects of the darkness on the audience in the movie theater and concluded, "The darkness, immobility, relative lack of distractions, and isolation from objective reality-oriented interpersonal events facilitate an ego regression so that ego boundaries are diffused, affective arousal is enhanced, and more primitive defenses are brought into play." (Evans, 1975:141)

Film also engages an audience physiologically, for it surrounds its audience with visual and aural stimuli that flood the senses. A film makes

its statement through composition, color, sound, and rhythm. The visual picture and the sound track engulf the eyes, ears, and mind all at once. Research conducted at the Psychological Institute of the University of Rome has revealed that the motion of film provokes kinesthetic responses in the audience such as muscular reflexes, motor impulses, increased pulse rate, and other metabolic behavior (Applbaum and Anatol, 1974:20). Movie theater owners have known this without the benefit of experimental research, for when they show horror films, they are often asked to increase the amount of air conditioning due to the increased perspiration of the excited viewers.

The film-viewing experience is one of mental and physical stimulation with the audience interacting with the events on the screen and with each other. The relationship of audience to film is an act of deep-seated communication. Watching a film is often a vicarious experience whereby the images on the screen become extensions of the individual personalities of the audience. Rudolf Arnheim, psychologist and film theorist, called film "the epidermis of reality," the skin off which our sensations reflect (Fell, 1975:15). Through film an audience can see its values personified, renew familiar experiences and feelings, experience new sensations, fulfill desires, and find relief from tensions and release from fears. Viewing a film in a movie theater is a collective experience with certain norms for behavior and interaction. Hushed silence, laughter, screams, and acceptable verbal responses are often the result of audience interaction. Departure from norms, such as people talking to each other instead of paying attention to the film, is subject to reprimands from other members of the audience.

The persuasive potential of film can be attributed to the filmmakers,

who consciously or unconsciously take sides during the process of planning and shooting their films. To make their films a commercial success, filmmakers will adapt to audience interests, selecting elements and events to be dramatized, to be emphasized, or to be ignored. Dino De Laurentiis, producer, explains, "Success is in isolating certain trends in which the public has a deep emotional interest." (Thomas, 1975:4D) Market research is in use at the major Hollywood studios where the plots of films, possible casting, and advertising of films are pretested (Higham, 1975:13). Alfred Hitchcock summed up the audience analysis approach, "The art of directing for the commercial market is to know just how far you can go." (Lindgren, 1968:20)

The selectivity exercised by filmmakers in order to manipulate audience responses is apparent in commercial, narrative films, but documentary and educational films are also manipulative. Documentary films may attempt to persuade an audience to act on behalf of some social, political, or economic goal, or to provide information and insight into a dilemma that aids in a decision-making process. Even cinéma-vérité (truth cinema) and direct cinema, which record real people and events without script or direction, can be persuasive because they are dependent on the filmmakers' editing decisions regarding what the editors choose to let the audience see. Educational films may attempt to persuade students to learn the presented skills and concepts. Thus, virtually all films are in some respect persuasive. In fact, films are widely recognized as one of the most effective communication links between people within society who do not relate to print forms of media (Geller and Kula, 1969:108,110).

In order to understand the implications of film as persuasive, it must first be examined as communication. Film is communication in which meaning is the result of a relationship between the implication of the filmmakers, the senders, and the inference of the audience, the receivers. Visual communication in film includes the transmission of signals received primarily through visual receptors. When received, the signals, along with the audio cues, are treated as a message.

The filmmakers, i.e., the producers, directors, writers, editors, camerapersons, actors, and other technicians and artists, employ selected symbols to communicate a message when they make decisions about the elements that enter into making a film, i.e., the script, location, cast, natural sound, dialogue, music, lens, camera setups, staging, composition, and editing. They sort, select, and transmit symbols through the medium of film to the audience with the hope that the audience will receive the message in a way that is similar to what is intended by the senders. The senders seek the voluntary cooperation of the receivers through a symbolic interaction with them. In turn, the receivers select and sort the meanings derived from the film through their perceptual-interpretative capabilities and place these meanings into their own system of cognitive feelings with varying degrees of intensity.

The audience's response to a film is part of the significant convergence of sender and receiver that brings a film to realization. Audiences bring to the film many variables--differing values, beliefs, group norms, attitudes, and behavioral patterns--which will affect their responses to it. Filmmakers calculate the predispositions of the audience in order to produce some behavioral response. Although the immediate audience response to a film has no effect on any message adjustment of a specific film after

it is released, the audience response after seeing a film can be considered as communicative feedback in the form of criticism of a film, recommendations to friends to see it, or multiple viewing.

Many filmmakers test their films on typical audiences, subsequently making changes in the film in response to audience feedback before the film is finally released. George Lucas tested Return of the Jedi in April, 1983 before two north San Francisco high school groups who thought they were in the theater to see a different film. Joan Miklin Silver's 1980 film, Head Over Heels, did not do well at the box office. She pulled it out of circulation, recut the film, changing the ending and the title, and released it in 1983 as Chilly Scenes of Winter. Whether or not the filmmakers pretest or change their films, there has to be some assurance that the film and the audience connect in some way. The experiences that films portray have to be shared experiences between the audience and the characters and events in the film. The persona of the actor on the screen is implicated with the persona of individual members of the audience. There has to be an intimate relationship between character and viewer. In order to provoke shared experiences, filmmakers make choices from persuasive techniques.

Persuasion is a communicative process that attempts to bring about a reinforcement or a change of attitude, belief, or behavior by producing a cognitive restructuring of one's image of the world or of one's frame of reference. To persuade is to influence someone thorugh a complex, continuing, interactive process in which a sender and a receiver are linked by symbols, verbal and nonverbal, through which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behavior because the persuadee has had perceptions enlarged or changed (O'Donnell and Kable, 1982:9). A positive response from a film audience might be,

"I never thought of it that way before" or "I never saw it that way before." The film's message is related to or contrasted with the audience's existing repertoire of information. Consequently, an individual member of the audience may think about, add to, or challenge the information in the message. As a result, a person's perceptions may be changed (Perloff and Brock in Roloff and Miller, 1980:69). Thus, persuasion, when it changes attitudes and behavior, changes perception as an integral part of the process.

To get an audience to suspend disbelief involves persuasion. To get an audience to accept the filmmakers' view of reality or fantasy is another way of eliciting the "I never thought of it that way before" response. Persuasion is not easily accomplished at any time, for an audience can be resistant to change even when its defenses are weakened or when it has expectations of only being entertained while viewing a film. Filmmakers may not deliberately intend to persuade beyond wanting a film to have audience appeal at the box office. Yet, filmmakers may have secondary desires to persuade, some of which may be unconscious. Whatever the intent, however, it can at least be said that a film can <u>function</u> persuasively for the audience.

At one time, film functioned as a major means of socialization for immigrants from Europe and Asia. They learned how Americans were supposed to talk, dress, and behave. The affluence depicted in the films also gave them incentive to work hard, get an education, and better themselves (Becker, 1983:255; Jowett and Linton, 1980:69). Today, the film audience is made up of young people in their teens and twenties who use films for social needs. Films give them someplace to go and something to talk about after they have been there. Anthony Schillaci calls film "modern man's morality play," where young people seek the values "that they have looked for in vain from the

from the social, political, or religious establishments." (Katz,1971:210) More often than not, the values depicted in film are the dominant values of society. A value is a special kind of belief that is both highly personal for an individual yet widely accepted by many people. A value is a normative standard that influences human endeavor. Values tend to be abstract and applicable to a variety of situations. People value love, justice, freedom, friendship, etc. It follows, then, if audieces value love, they will be favorably predisposed toward the characters in a film who are in love or who exhibit loving behaviors. If people value justice, they will prefer a film's denouement that secures justice. Film functions to reaffirm and enforce values by supporting common value norms or by exposing deviations from those norms.

E.T., which made $190 million and is the biggest money maker thus far, is a film filled with contemporary values. Although its story is science fiction and the title character is an alien from outer space, the values are typically American and Christian. Elliot, the young boy whom E.T. befriends, is a child of divorced parents who misses his father. When he finds his father's shirt, he smells Old Spice and remembers when his dad took him to ball games and movies. The references to his father being in Mexico with another woman upsets Elliot's mother. The value of family is reaffirmed by the negation of it which Elliot's father has enacted. The value of affluence combined with tradition is also reaffirmed. Elliot's house is in an upper middle-class Los Angeles suburb, yet there are woods and fields close enough for him to play in them. Suburbia and rural America are idealized. The rooms of Elliot, his sister, and his brother are filled with toys, in fact, an excess of toys, so many that E.T. is able to successfully

hide in Gertie's closet among many stuffed animals. There is also an abundance of food, especially junk food. There is Coke and Coors in the refrigerator and the trail that Elliot leaves for E.T. to follow is made of Reese's peanut butter Pieces. The children read Buck Rogers comic books and watch television cartoons. The trappings of American popular culture are presented as a norm. The traditional ritual of trick or treating is also reinforced.

In the midst of this plenty, Elliot feels alienated and empty. E.T. comes from afar to be his friend and to fill the gap of the missing father. When Elliot tells the friendly NASA scientist, "He came to me," the scientist's reply is, "His being here is a miracle." Thus, E.T. is a Christ figure about whom Elliot says, "I'll believe in you all my life." E.T., of course, replies, pointing to Elliot, "I'll be right here." The NASA scientists treat E.T. as an object thus setting up a division between science and religion. The audience is manipulated to perceive the scientists as menacing, but Elliot's love for E.T. overcomes all odds. Elliot and his friends on bicycles are able to win the race to send E.T. home despite being outnumbered by the scientists and the police. The children, whose values are love, justice, Christianity, and determination, triumph over authority, adults, and science.

E.T. succeeded in attracting huge numbers of people to the box office, many of them for repeated viewings. It works because of its special effects and because of its appealing story, but it is very persuasive in its appeals to values that are prevalent in American society.

Along with its filmic appeal, E.T. also had many external support systems through marketing of E.T. items--lunch boxes, t-shirts, toys, masks, etc. Although the marketing efforts were very sophisticated, the public

cooperated with the knowledge that these items were spin-offs of a much-loved movie.

This leads to another function of film, for film consumption along with consumption of spin-offs serves the American economic system. It is a form of consumer socialization, for favorable attitudes toward a film can increase our desires for particular kinds of goods related to the film and the characters with whom we identify (Becker, 1983:407).

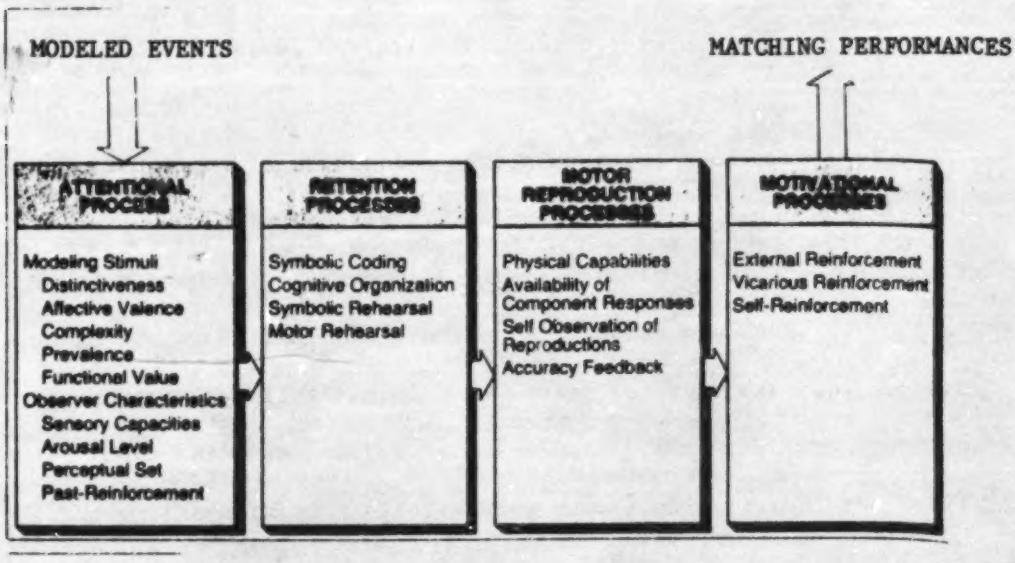
Film also functions to help its young audience develop self-concepts through identification with the characters in the film. People respond to those things in a film that they find significant for themselves. The story in a film overlaps with the viewer's experiences in life. Life's variety comes not from the duration of an experience, but from its intensity. We seek confirmation of ourselves in film and thus find a reflection of ourselves on the screen.

A fiction film usually provokes a reaction from the audience that depends upon a projection of character or personality into those of the actress or actor playing in the film. A member of the audience is projected into a series of fictional complications and has a vested interest in the outcome. A film can give an aura of reality to notions, situations, and things that may be essentially unreal. Thus, "life" can be worked out as an audience would like it to be but seldom is. The Russian poet Moravsky expresses the appeal of the dramatic film: "For those whom life has cheated, movies open the electric paradise."

Yet, there has to be a connection between the "paradise" and the world that the audience inhabits, between the characteristics of the people acting in the film and the audience. The connection comes through shared experiences, however remote they may be, between the film's characters

and events and the personal lives and wishes of the audience. In addition to the pleasure derived from shared experiences, audiences gain meaning as well. If the viewer becomes psychologically tied to the person on the screen, there is a chance that the viewer will assimilate the ideological standpoint of the character and, perhaps, his or her behavior.

There is sociological evidence that film audiences sometimes model behavior after certain characters in films. The overt evidence is in the form of dress, language, hair styles, etc. To what extent other behavior is adopted is unknown. Albert Bandura, who has conducted experimental research on aggressive behavior in film and its relationship to aggressive behavior in life (discussed later in this paper), says that people form concepts of how new behaviors are performed from the observation of others. His Social Learning Theory supports the concept that modeling influences produce new behaviors because they give us new information about how to behave. Through observation of others, people axquire symbolic representations of modeled activities that can serve as a guide for new behaviors later on (1977). Bandura's model of Learning Theory and Modeling follows:



Observational modeling, according to Bandura, is governed by four processes: attentional processes, retention processes, motor-reproduction processes, and motivational processes.

Attentional Processes

In order for observed behavior to influence the behavior of an audience, it has to gain the attention of the audience. People pay attention to that which strikes their senses with greater impact and to that which is related to their needs, goals, and motives. External factors of attention come from stimuli that exist outside of an individual and that demand attention. Internal factors of attention are inner predispositions held by an individual that cause the individual to want to pay attention to certain stimuli (Winans, 1915).

Film is a multi-sensory, attention-gaining and maintaining experience. The flickering of successive images attracts the audience and induces it to pay attention, causing the audience to move along with the characters from scene to scene, subsequently linking the viewers to the action on the screen.

Sight and sound techniques in film can be extremely manipulative in producing attention responses from an audience. Film creates its own time and space, moving time forward or back, making things high, near, or far. The camera can move in for a close-up shot for intimacy, or it can pull back in a long shot for detachment. The lens of the camera can sharpen or blur an image. Focus can isolate characters, suggest an emotional state, and influence the audience's attitude toward the subject on the screen. For example, in Cassavettes's A Woman Under the Influence, the mother-in-law,standing on screen left,tells the doctor,standing on screen right, that Mabel, who is in screen center, is a "nothing." Immediately after the word

"nothing" is spoken, the focus on Mabel totally blurs her image into nothing while the mother-in-law and doctor remain in sharp focus. The effect is stunning and impossible to ignore.

These and other technical aspects of filmmaking are at the disposal of the filmmaker, giving the power of determining viewer perception of the film. One significant aspect of this is point of view or the perspective from which a story is told. The camera provides the point of view, for it reveals only those details and actions that the filmmaker wants to show to the audience. Point of view determines the position of the audience and tells it where they are. It lets the audience know whether it is to be a spectator or a participant in events such as fist fights, sports events, or car chases. It determines the side that is to be taken in a conflict. Above all, it influences perception of the characters and subsequent identification with them.

The subjective camera tells the audience not only what it is seeing but also how it should react. Hitchcock used the technique of first showing the audience a film character looking at something; second, he cut to what the character sees, and then he cut back to the character to show the audience the character's reaction. This has the effect of influencing the audience to react in a like manner. Camera angles also influence the audience's perception of the information in given shots. Low camera angles cause the subject to loom out over the spectator, whereas high angles reduce the subject's size and cause diminishment of the subject in the minds of the viewers.

Film has enormous capacity to gain attention and then to direct it, but what is seen and heard must also be retained if behavior is to be influenced.

Retention Processes

After the stimulus that has gained attention is gone, there must be something about the behavior observed that will cause an individual to remember it. Bandura says that the behavior must be stored in memory in some symbolic form. Through symbols, transitory behavioral modeling experiences can become permanent in the memory system. The processes of imagery and verbal coding provide people with the means to retain concepts of modeled behaviors. Studies by Bandura and his associates (1969, 1971, 1973) showed that subjects who expressed modeled behaviors in words, concise labels, or vivid imagery remembered those behavioral patterns better than those subjects who observed or were distracted during the observation period.

Film with its capacity for vivid imagery has the potential for stored symbolic images. It would be difficult to forget the farewell scene between Elliot and E.T. not just because it is vivid in its image and sound but because it causes members of an audience to remember their own farewell scenes. A stimulus is more likely to be retained if the observer has an accompanying motive to remember it. Such motives reside in familiarity, previous experience, desires, hopes, and goals. As with other aspects of persuasion in film, the impact is the result of the interaction between the viewer and the events on the screen. The viewer has to bring something to the film and it, together with the external stimulus in the film, produce a reaction.

Even when a behavioral stimulus is attended to and retained, it means little unless the observer activates motor reproduction processes in order to try out the observed behavior.

Motor Reproduction Processes

Symbolic representation that has been retained can be converted into behavior if the person can and does activate motor reproduction processes. For new behaviors to occur, there must be an involvement of cognitive organization of responses, their initiation, their monitoring, and their refinement on the basis of feedback. If all these components can be coordinated effectively, then a new behavior may occur (Bandura, 1977:27).

This means that an observed behavior in a film has to be physically possible in order for it to be modeled. It also has to be practised. The person trying it out may be awkward or unskilled at first. On the other hand, the film industry can make a behavior accessible by providing the materials to carry it out. This is one of the few ways available of knowing to what extent individuals are effected by the films they see. If they purchase and use articles that were shown in a film, then an assumption of behavioral influence can be made. The last part of behavioral adopttion has to do with motivation to carry out the behavior.

Motivational Processes

Bandura separates acquisition of modeling experience and the actual performance of the modeled behavior. The key difference is motivation, and the primary motivation appears to be the observation of positive consequences consistently associated with the behavior.

If a viewer sees a filmic character achieve something positive as the result of a behavior, and if the viewer relates to the positive achievement, then this may motivate the viewer to duplicate the behavior. If a sports activity wins a filmic character recognition and social status, then a viewer may be motivated to work and practice to become an athlete for the recognition and social status that he or she desires.

What constitutes positive consequences varies from individual to individual. The perceived consequences have to be of value to an individual in order for them to motivate the individual to adopt or change a behavior. Bandura says that anticipation of positive reinforcement influences what a viewer observes and the degree of attention that is paid to a given behavior (1977:37). If an observer is notified ahead of time that the behavior about to be observed will yield positive consequences, the observer will pay closer attention to it.

Many factors other than filmic stimuli contribute toward behavior change, but it is quite possible that the events in a film are influential. Take, for example, the thousands of women who participate in Jane Fonda-type "workout" sessions all across the nation. Fonda's Workout book has been a bestseller and the Workout videotape is a favorite rental tape and one that is often purchased. It is possible that this is part of a general fitness fad, but Fonda's appearance in On Golden Pond where her magnificently toned body was enhanced by a bikini in the back flip scene has been cited by many women as an inspiration to participate in "workouts." Although Fonda was not shown engaging in exercise behavior, unless you count her back flip off the diving board, she displayed the positive consequences of exercise which had been publicized in other media.

Film has the capacity to gain and maintain the attention of an audience, to provide vivid symbolic representation that may aid the retention of the image of a behavior, and to depict and promote the consequences of a behavior. Bandura's Social Learning Theory deserves attention as a means of explaining the role of film and behavior change.

Another essential activity during the film experience is the

sensation of psychological discomfort. This may occur when a film's hero is chased by the villain, when a horrible, bloody murder is depicted, or when a favorite character dies on screen. Psychological discomfort is the basis for several balance theories in the study of persuasion.

Balance Theories

Balance theories are based on the premise that a conflict between values and behavior, values and attitudes, or people and attitudes causes psychological discomfort. It is human nature to dislike an imbalanced state and to seek psychological balance or homeostasis. Balance theories explain relationships between people or between people and objects in their environment(Heider, 1946), how people view associative assertions that may be in conflict (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955), and cognitive dissonance resulting from decision-making, forced compliance with given behaviors, and disagreement with important others (Festinger, 1957).

If the members of an audience hold strong values or attitudes and if they vicariously experience a violation of those values or attitudes, they are likely to experience psychological imbalance. In order to relieve the imbalance, they may question their values or adopt a new attitude or have a dormant attitude revitalized. They could also reject the film or choose to ignore the source of the psychological imbalance.

Most films are capable of creating psychological tension in the audience. Most films tend to reinforce values and previously held attitudes, thus the restoration of balance is achieved when audience values and attitudes are restored at the end of the film when good triumphs over evil, true love is rewarded, crime is punished, and all's right with the world. On the other hand, some films may leave the viewer in a state of psychological discomfort causing him or her to consider a new attitude long

after the film is over.

People who saw Roman Polanski's film, Chinatown, a film that dealt with greed and corruption in both people and civil institutions, probably disliked the greedy, corrupt, murdering, and incestuous father played by John Huston because people are usually predisposed to have negative attitudes toward greed, corruption, murder, and incest. On the other hand, people probably had positive attitudes toward Mrs. Mulrahy, played by Faye Dunaway, because she represented positive attitudes toward personal inner strength and motherhood. One student in my Persuasion class who analyzed Chinatown for an assignment said that she identified so strongly with Mrs. Mulrahy that she was "furious when she was killed and unsettled for a long time after the film was over." The reason the student was furious and unsettled had something to do with her values. Instead of witnessing the victory of good over evil, she saw evil triumph. This produced some psychological imbalance between her value and the outcome of the film. Perhaps she could restore her balance by accepting Polanski's attitude that sometimes society is greedy and corrupt, and people get away with corruption.

Through the application of balance theory to film, viewers can understand how and why a film produces a new awareness about the world, possibly resulting in a "I never thought of it that way before" reaction.

When a film is surprisingly popular, it is not unusual to examine the film itself for clues to current values, patterns of behavior, and human relationships. An Officer and a Gentleman has grossed $125 million as of May 23, 1983 (Newsweek, May 23, 1983, p. 52). Many people thought it was an old-fashioned, 1940s-style romance. Newsweek cited it as a perfect merger of movie iconographies and of women's conflicting fantasies--wanting

their men at once wild and civilized." (May 23, 1983:50) The explanation offered for this conclusion was that Richard Gere playing Zack Mayo is a wild man who has a tattoo, rides a motorcycle, and lives in a dive with his whore-mongering father, yet he becomes an executive who accepts discipline, learns responsibility, wears a shiny white suit and is not afraid to love. Yet, the film has as its basis the classic "rite of initiation" story. Zack is a loner who is chided by his drill instructor, Foley, "You don't give a shit about anyone but yourself." Through his military experience Zack learns to help others. He helps Seeger, a fellow classmate, climb over the wall. He befriends Sid and mourns his death through suicide. He changes, as he promised Foley he would, because he has "got no where else to go." The message is that there are no shortcuts to improvement and a life of success. If you want to better yourself, you have to work very hard. That, of course, is the Horatio Alger myth, central to American values. The film is a favorable depiction of military life without glorifying it.

An Officer and a Gentleman is also a love story, and Zack, the loner, learns the value of love, a good woman, and marriage. In fact, he rescues Paula, played by Debra Winger, from the dreary life of a factory worker. He has grown from alienated outcast to successful hero. The values in this film are old-fashioned but not out-of-style. Accompanied by some erotic love scenes, more like the 1980s-style film, it is an irresistable combination and possible proof that American values have not changed very much.

It is unlikely that any film will appeal to all viewers and certainly unlikely that a film will persuade all viewers. There will always be some disagreement over the persuasive effectiveness of a film. Nonetheless, there is evidence that film has been a stimulus for both behavioral and attitudinal changes in audiences.

Effects of Film

Most of the studies of the effects of film on audiences were done at least thirty years ago. In the 1930s, the Payne Fund studies, conducted by a number of sociologists and psychologists and sponsored by the U.S. Motion Picture Research Council, were the first systematic attempt to use experimental techniques to find out the effects of commercial films on specific attitudes and behavior, particularly in the case of children and adolescents (cited in McQuail, 1972:123-4). H. Blumer (1933) found that children imitated the action of film stars and that the films produced heightened emotions of fear, sorrow, and passion. R.C Peterson and L.L. Thurstone(1933) observed statistically significant shifts in the attitudes of adolescents toward capital punishment, race relations, and Nazism after exposure to films such as Birth of a Nation, Sons of the Gods, and Welcome Danger which dealt with these subjects. The researchers administered pretests and posttests after a lapse of time. The attitude shifts were in the direction indicated by the film as a result of the exposure to it. In the case of at least one group, the effects persisted in a significant amount for a period of five months. Of the thirteen films viewed, however, only six produced significant attitude changes.

M. Wiese and S. Cole (1946) used a free association technique and had three hundred children answer questions regarding the ideological points in the film Tomorrow the World before and after viewing the film. Measureable effects on attitudes in the direction indicated by the film were observed. However, the effects of the film were proportionate to the social, economic, and cultural origins of the individual subjects. This particular study documented an important generalization: the socioeconomic background

of the audience determines in large measure what a film means.

J.P. Mayer offered a series of case studies of British audiences' responses to film and concluded that film often served as a vehicle for making individuals aware of their own personalities (1946:267). F. Fearing, in his review of the effects of film on audiences, said, "Motion pictures achieve their effect because they help the individual to cognize his world" (in McQuail, 1982:119). Fearing discussed filmic persuasion as a means of providing a person with interpretative frames of reference that "either reaffirm the norms of his culture or group or reveal previously unsuspected and possibly contrasting alternatives to these norms. He sees how other people behave in a wide variety of situations and is thus provided with patterns of behavior which he may accept or reject" (126).

M. Keilhacker (1958) investigated the pedagogical effects of film on children and found that children learned values about truth, honesty, and behavior from film long before they went to school. He said that children are not spectators of film but are coactors.

More recent research has come about because of the concern with violence depicted on television and its possible effects. Two major researchers who have tried to explore the connection have used both media of film and television. L. Berkowitz, who has been testing adolescents and young adults, and Bandura, who has been testing children, have for almost two decades, engaged in very careful, piece-by-piece experimental research on the causal relationship between filmed and televised aggression and subsequent behavior. Although both Berkowitz and Bandura and their colleagues were very careful to state that they make no claim to any situation outside of the laboratory, they found that film and television violence can incite violent behavior in viewers. Berkowitz said that

"filmed violence may well increase the probability that someone in the audience will behave aggressively in a later situation [if] the fantasy situation appears socially justified" (Berkowitz, Corwin, and Heironimus, 1963:229). He also indicated that repeated exposure to violence increases the probability of subsequent aggressive acts for some members of the audience, but other factors also determine what may happen--how aggressive the subject is, how hostile the film makes him or her, how much he or she associates the story in the film with situations in which he or she learned hostile behavior, and the intensity of guilt and/or aggression anxiety aroused by the exposure to the film (Berkowitz, 1962). Bandura also found that children, under certain conditions, are apt to reproduce aggressive action after observing adults exhibit novel and aggressive action on the screen (Bandura, Ross, and Ross, 1963). Reviews of their extensive research lead us to the conclusion that sometimes media violence may be persuasively effective with the attitude changes consisting more often of modifications than of conversions. With respect to behavior changes, it can be generalized that some types of depicted violence will be found to have some types of effects of the aggression levels of some types of children under some types of conditions.

One of the more interesting aspects of the experimental evidence concerning the relationship between the media and behavior change is that subjects tend to be influenced by film and television characters that they perceive to be similar to themselves. Viewer identification appears to be the central concept in the interpretation of film and television effects. The extent to which viewers rated themselves as similar to particular characters influenced their reactions to the aggressors in the media.

More experimental research is needed to determine the effects of film on its audience. It is a complex area of research and poses some difficult research questions. The release of Return of the Jedi on May 25, 1983 was a major American event. Stories about its pending release have been on radio, television, and newspapers. Excitement mounted as the date of release got closer and children as well as adults talked about it. When a film creates so much anticipation and excitement, it surely has the potential to be influential. We need studies to determine how and in what ways it may influence.

Film can be a powerful instrument of persuasion that can enlarge our experiences and change perceptions of self and the environment so that we can say, "I never thought of it that way before." It is through such interaction, a connection between the viewer's experiences and the film's events, that film has the power to persuade.

Michael Ritchie, in his film Film: The Art of the Impossible, shows the viewers how the filmmaker forces the audience to suspend disbelief (1972). He demonstrates how in his film Downhill Racer he forced the audience to believe that a skier won a race in an impossible situation. In reality, there was no way that the skier could have crossed over in front of his competitor to beat him to the finish line, yet through the editing process he does. Ritchie says, "We see because we want to see." He demonstrates how the subjective camera, editing, and sound together with identification with the audience and a knowledge of the audience's predispositions produce a persuasive impact. Ritchie says that it is not a matter of "seeing is believing," but rather "believing is seeing." He shows us that the viewers willingly accept it not as a record of reality, but as a re-creation or reality dependent on human vision.

Film should be studied as a persuasive force in society because, like other forms of persuasive communication, it, too, has the potential to change behavior and attitudes. Schillaci reminds us, "Education increasingly means developing the ability to live humanly in the technological culture by changing it. Film is forever spinning out intensifications of the environment which make it visible and livable. . . . [It is] an art that . . . can humanize change by conditioning us to live comfortably immersed in its fluctuations" (1971:188).

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